



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement

30 CFR Part 926

[SATS No. MT-040-FOR; Docket ID: OSM-2023-0001;
S1D1S SS08011000 SX064A000 231S180110;
S2D2S SS08011000 SX064A000 23XS501520]

Montana Regulatory Program

AGENCY: Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule; public comment period and opportunity for public hearing on proposed amendment.

SUMMARY: We, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE), are announcing receipt of a proposed amendment to the Montana regulatory program (hereinafter, the Montana program) under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA or the Act). During the 2019 legislative session, Montana updated its Montana Strip and Underground Mine Reclamation Act and Montana Code Annotated. Accordingly, Montana submitted this proposed amendment to OSMRE on its own initiative. The proposed amendment requires a permit applicant's compliance information to be updated and approved if a bankruptcy or reorganization results in a change of ownership for the applicant. Furthermore, the proposed amendment

requires permit owners to provide financial assurance for employee pensions. Lastly, Montana proposes a typographical correction.

This document gives the times and locations that the Montana program and this proposed amendment to that program are available for your inspection, the comment period during which you may submit written comments on the amendment, and the procedures that we will follow for the public hearing, if one is requested.

DATES: We will accept written comments on this amendment until 4:00 p.m., Mountain Daylight Time (MDT), [Insert date 30 days after the date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER]. If requested, we may hold a public hearing or meeting on the amendment on [Insert date 25 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER]. We will accept requests to speak at a hearing until 4:00 p.m., MDT on [Insert date 15 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by SATS No. MT-040-FOR, by any of the following methods:

- *Mail/Hand Delivery:* OSMRE, Attn: Jeffrey Fleischman, P.O. Box 11018, 100 East B Street, Room 4100, Casper, Wyoming 82602
- *Fax:* (307) 261-6552
- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* The amendment has been assigned Docket ID: OSM-2023-0001. If you would like to submit comments, go to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

Instructions: All submissions received must include the agency name and docket number for this rulemaking. For detailed instructions on submitting comments and additional information on the rulemaking process, see the “Public Comment Procedures” heading of

the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section of this document.

Docket: For access to the docket to review copies of the Montana program, this amendment, a listing of any scheduled public hearings or meetings, and all written comments received in response to this document, you must go to the address listed below during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. You may receive one free copy of the amendment by contacting OSMRE's Casper Field Office or the full text of the program amendment is available for you to read at www.regulations.gov.

Attn: Jeffrey Fleischman, Field Office Director
Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement
100 East B Street, Casper, Wyoming 82602
Telephone: (307) 261-6550
Email: jfleischman@osmre.gov

In addition, you may review a copy of the amendment during regular business hours at the following location:

Attn: Dan Walsh, Mining Bureau Chief
Coal and Opencut Mining Bureau
Department of Environmental Quality,
P.O. Box 200901
Helena, MT 59601-0901
Telephone: (406) 444-6791
Email: dwalsh@mt.gov

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Attn: Jeffrey Fleischman, Field Office Director

Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement

100 East B Street, Casper, Wyoming 82602

Telephone: (307) 261-6550

Email: jfleischman@osmre.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

- I. Background on the Montana Program
- II. Description of the Proposed Amendment
- III. Public Comment Procedures
- IV. Statutory and Executive Order Reviews

I. Background on the Montana Program

Subject to OSMRE's oversight, Section 503(a) of the Act permits a State to assume primacy for the regulation of surface coal mining and reclamation operations on non-Federal and non-Indian lands within its borders by demonstrating that its approved, State program includes, among other things, State laws and regulations that govern surface coal mining and reclamation operations in accordance with the Act and consistent with the Federal regulations. See 30 U.S.C. 1253(a)(1) and (7).

On the basis of these criteria, the Secretary of the Interior approved the Montana program on October 24, 1980. You can find background information on the Montana program, including the Secretary's findings, the disposition of comments, and conditions of approval of the Montana program in the October 24, 1980, **Federal Register** (45 FR 70445). You can also find later actions concerning the Montana program and program amendments at 30 CFR 926.25.

II. Description of the Proposed Amendment

By letter dated February 16, 2023 (Administrative Record No. MT-040-01), Montana sent us an amendment to its program under SMCRA (30 U.S.C. 1201 *et seq.*). We found Montana's proposed amendment to be administratively complete on February 17, 2023. Montana submitted the proposed amendment to us, on its own volition, following changes to its statutes in 2019. During the 2019 legislative session, the Montana legislature passed Senate Bill 201 (SB 201). SB 201 updated the Montana Strip and Underground Mine Reclamation Act and §82-4-222, Montana Code Annotated (MCA).

Montana first proposes to add language, at MCA 82-4-222(1)(g)(i), that would require an applicant for a permit to update their ownership or compliance history with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) if bankruptcy or reorganization results in changes to ownership parties specified in this section. The proposed language also requires that DEQ approve these changes.

Second, the amendment proposes to add language, at MCA 82-4-222(1)(g)(iii), that would require the DEQ to develop rules for permit owners to provide bonding or other financial assurance necessary to meet their financial obligations for employee pensions and reclamation obligations. Furthermore, operators are prohibited from passing associated costs onto purchasers who are dependent on the operator to generate electricity for customers. Lastly, Montana proposes a typographical correction at MCA 82-4-222(1)(q). The full text of the program and/or plan amendment is available for you to read at the locations listed above under **ADDRESSES** or at www.regulations.gov.

III. Public Comment Procedures

Under the provisions of 30 CFR 732.17(h), we are seeking your comments on

whether the amendment satisfies the applicable program approval criteria of 30 CFR 732.15. If we approve the amendment, it will become part of the State program.

Electronic or Written Comments

If you submit written or electronic comments on the proposed rule during the 30-day comment period, they should be specific, confined to issues pertinent to the proposed regulations, and explain the reason for any recommended change(s). We appreciate any and all comments, but those most useful and likely to influence decisions on the final regulations will be those that either involve personal experience or include citations to and analyses of SMCRA, its legislative history, its implementing regulations, case law, other pertinent State or Federal laws or regulations, technical literature, or other relevant publications.

We cannot ensure that comments received after the close of the comment period (see **DATES**) or sent to an address other than those listed (see **ADDRESSES**) will be included in the docket for this rulemaking and considered.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Public Hearing

If you wish to speak at the public hearing, contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** by 4:00 p.m., MDT on [Insert date 15 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER]. If you are disabled and need reasonable accommodations to attend a public hearing, contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**. We will arrange the location and time

of the hearing with those persons requesting the hearing. If no one requests an opportunity to speak, we will not hold a hearing.

To assist the transcriber and ensure an accurate record, we request, if possible, that each person who speaks at the public hearing provide us with a written copy of his or her comments. The public hearing will continue on the specified date until everyone scheduled to speak has been given an opportunity to be heard. If you are in the audience and have not been scheduled to speak and wish to do so, you will be allowed to speak after those who have been scheduled. We will end the hearing after everyone scheduled to speak and others present in the audience who wish to speak, have been heard.

Public Meeting

If only one person requests an opportunity to speak, we may hold a public meeting rather than a public hearing. If you wish to meet with us to discuss the amendment, please request a meeting by contacting the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**. All such meetings are open to the public and, if possible, we will post notices of meetings at the locations listed under **ADDRESSES**. We will make a written summary of each meeting a part of the administrative record.

IV. Statutory and Executive Order Reviews

Executive Order 12866 - Regulatory Planning and Review and Executive Order 13563—Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review

Executive Order 12866 provides that the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will review all significant rules. Pursuant to OMB guidance, dated October 12, 1993, the approval of State program amendments is exempted from OMB review under Executive Order 12866. Executive Order 13563, which reaffirms and supplements Executive Order 12866, retains this exemption.

Other Laws and Executive Orders Affecting Rulemaking

When a State submits a program amendment to OSMRE for review, our regulations at 30 CFR 732.17(h) require us to publish a notice in the **Federal Register** indicating receipt of the proposed amendment, its text or a summary of its terms, and an opportunity for public comment. We conclude our review of the proposed amendment after the close of the public comment period and determine whether the amendment should be approved, approved in part, or not approved. At that time, we will also make the determinations and certifications required by the various laws and executive orders governing the rulemaking process and include them in the final rule.

List of Subjects in 30 CFR part 926.

State regulatory program approval, State-federal cooperative agreement,
Required program amendments.

David A. Berry,
Regional Director, Unified Regions 5, 7-11
[FR Doc. 2023-10492 Filed: 5/22/2023 8:45 am; Publication Date: 5/23/2023]